

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, NP

SUBJECT: HOME MINISTER STRIKES OUT AGAINST REFORMERS

REF: KATHMANDU 2313 AND PREVIOUS

1. MINISTER OF HOME AND PANCHAYAT AFFAIRS BHOJ RAJ GHIMERE
JUNE 8 LASHED OUT AGAINST ADVOCATES OF MAJOR POLITICAL
REFORMS AND WARNED THAT "STERN ACTION" WOULD BE TAKEN
AGAINST THOSE PERSONS WHO WERE BENT ON "UNDERMINING" THE
PANCHAYAT SYSTEM. GHIMERE IS QUOTED BY RSS (SEMI-GOVERNMENT
NEWS AGENCY) AS SAYING THAT DIRECT ELECTIONS, NOW BEING
WIDELY CALLED FOR, WOULD "ADVERSELY AFFECT THE FUNDAMENTAL
TENETS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM." GHIMERE CHARGED THAT
THERE WERE THOSE "AT HOME AND ABROAD WITH SINISTER DESIGNS
TO SUBVERT THE PARTYLESS PANCHAYAT SYSTEM." NO ONE, HE
SAID, WOULD BE ALLOWED TO CHANGE THE FUNDAMENTAL SYSTEM IN
THE NAME OF HUMAN OR POLITICAL RIGHTS. CHIMERE ALSO
REITERATED THE ROYALIST VIEW THAT BASIC RIGHTS AND POLITICAL
POWER FLOWED FROM THE CROWN, NOT FROM THE PEOPLE.

2. COMMENT: IT IS NOT CLEAR FROM NEWS ACCOUNTS WHETHER
GHIMERE MEANT TO LUMP TOGETHER ADVOCATES OF SWEEPING REFORM
AND THE MORE EXTREME POLITICAL EXILES, BUT HIS BROADSIDE
WOULD APPEAR ON THE FACE OF IT TO INCLUDE A GREAT MANY
PERSONS WHO IN RECENT WEEKS HAVE CALLED FOR DIRECT, ADULT
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FRANCHISE AS WELL AS MAKING THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

RESPONSIBLE TO THE NATIONAL PANCHAYAT RATHER THAN TO THE KING. WHILE ON THE ONE HAND HE THREATENED "STERN ACTION," GHIMERE ALSO POINTED TO RECENT PUBLICITY GIVEN REFORM ADVOCATES AS EVIDENCE THAT POLITICAL RIGHTS WERE NOW ENNOYED BY ALL IN NEPAL. ASIDE FROM THE THREAT OF RETALIATION, GHIMERE STATED PUBLICLY WHAT MANY HAVE BEEN SAYING PRIVATELY FOR SOME TIME: IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE PALACE WILL ACCEPT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM WHICH ARE SO BROAD AS TO ALTER COMPLETELY THE NATURE OF THE PANCHAYAT SYSTEM. WE CONTINUE TO WONDER WHY THE PALACE HAS ALLOWED PUBLIC DEBATE TO GO ON FOR SO LONG AS TO BUILD UP HOPES THAT MAJOR REFORMS ARE IN THE OFFING. THE DEMAND FOR A RETURN TO A NEAR PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY HAS BEEN GROWING, FED IN PART BY THE WIDESPREAD PUBLICITY GIVEN THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM COMMISSION. ALL THIS HAS CONTINUED WITHOUT ANY SIGNIFICANT REBUTTAL FROM THE PALACE OR FROM ITS ROYALIST SUPPORTERS. GHIMERE'S SPEECH IS THE FIRST SUCH PUBLIC RESPONSE, AND MAY BE THE OPENING SHOT IN A COUNTER CAMPAIGN SINCE THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO MOVE SOON TO CUT OFF DEBATE (OR A LEAST DRAW REALISTIC LIMITS TO IT) IN ORDER TO PREVENT A STRONG SENSE OF DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE EVENT ONLY MINOR REFORMS ARE ACCEPTED. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE WHETHER OTHERS NOW DECIDE TO FALL IN LINE WITH GHIMERE IN PREACHING RESTRAINT AND "SENSIBLE REFORMS."

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